WHAT ON EARTH IS THIS?

Welcome to the Midnite Software Gazette, an off-the-wall publication of the Central Illinois PET Users. (PET is a trademark of Commodore Business Machine Inc.0 It is our attempt to fill the vacuum in PET reviews since the PET GAZETTE folded a year ago. Until then, nearly every available PET program was reviewed quickly. Since, lots of PET programs have been offered for sale, but very few reviewed. Some of the new programs are VERY expensive. Who wants to spend $100+ on a program that may be junk?

Who are we to do the reviews?...Just PET owners with lots of software. JS has written some published reviews. The rest have other writing experience. Between us, we have all models & varieties of PET equipment, except the 8032. We want PETdom to prosper. Good software will help. We will point you to it, & steer you away from trash.

The Gazette is mailed FREE to all who send a self-addressed reply envelope with two stamps to this address:

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(Overseas airmail postage for 1 oz. is $0.52U.S.) If you want the next issue, send an extra envelope. We do not charge for subscriptions. (We also don't turn down contributions.) We will not notify you of new issues. As each issue is done, we stuff it in the envelopes on hand, & mail them. Your job is to copy the newsletter for others! This should be a quarterly review, but all we guarantee is--it will be worth every penny you pay for it!

Authors willing to risk a review are invited to send in programs. Only your reviewer will see them. PET users are welcome to send guest reviews. Be honest & fair in them. Keep them short, or they'll be edited. If you have a program you want to sell, but can't see spending $2,500 for a full-page ad in Byte, we'll review it for you. If your program isn't already advertised widely, we'll include your address or phone number in the review so folks can order your programs. (This isn't a come-on to build our library. We have too many programs already!)

Our key questions of a program are:

1) Who can use it?
2) Does it work?
3) Is it fun?
4) Does it do anything important?
5) Is it worth the cost?
6) What don't the ads say?

In this first issue, the reviews are by Jim Strasma & Jim Oldfield. Later issues will include offerings from the rest of the club. All reviews are the opinion of the reviewer; like all human efforts, they may include errors. Corrections are welcome.

VISICALC, $200 from Personal Software. Protected. needs 32k & disk. This is a super program, as Apple owners already know. It is both highly useful and fun to use. The instructions are the best yet. Well worth the cost. My only gripe is that it uses a dummy ROM at $9000 & runs out of memory too soon. A functional ROM would leave more memory for data. Otherwise, it's perfect. -JS

WORD PRO 2 & 3 $200 & $300 from Professional Software. Protected. 2 needs 16k. 3 needs 32. Both need disk. As most PET users know, this is the other super program. PET word processing is second to none with these. Both are very well documented. Use 2 for a great letter. use 3 for anything longer. In regular use, either is worth its cost. 2 uses a dummy ROM at $b000, 3's dummy is at $a000. 3 has more commands than Commodore has ROM sets. -JS

PROFILER, $100 from Intermountain Data. Needs a disk. Claims to maintain 1100 files per diskette, but only about 100 can be in the same database. No way would I pay this much for a 4k Basic database manager with sequential files! -JS

JINSAM, $150 & up, from Jini Microsystems. Protected. Needs 16k & a disk. Not for DOS 2. The best available PET database manager. Very complete. LOTS of documentation. FAST random access to 650 records. Over 150k of well-written Basic programs, & add-on modules to do about everything. Uses a dummy ROM at $9000. Current version takes some setup & lots of disks. Well worth it for serious uses. Far better than their earlier JINI databare, sold by the Computer Factory for $125. -JS

TALKING CALCULATOR, $15 from Programma International. Needs 16k plus second cassette buffer. Not for Basic 4. A must for blind people, & great fun for kids. Very recognizable speech. -JS

BASIC PROGRAMMER'S TOOLKIT ROM, $50 & $80, from Palo Alto ICs. Not for Basic 4.0.* Best known of all PET programs. Adds several vital commands to Basic. In ROM at $b000. Uses end of second cassette buffer. Fine manual. If you write programs, you need it! -JS

DISK-O-PRO, $75 from Skyles Electric Works. Basic 2 only. Good imitation of Basic $.0 for those who don't want to throw out old programs. Has other added commands, notably beep, scroll & print-using. 4k ROM at $9000. Compatible with Toolkit ROM. Software compatible with programs for Basic 4, unless they use machine-language ROM calls. Works even during program execution. Slows Basic 20-30% in use. Manual is too brief. Has a fair list of no-no's. Ignoring some crashes Basic. Not quite as good as having both Basic 2 and Basic 4. Like Basic 4, uses most of second cassette buffer.-JS

EXTRAMON, $15 from Programma International. Not for Basic 1.* 2k SUPER monitor. Does for machine-language what the Toolkit ROM does for Basic. Lots of VERY useful added commands. OK to exchange. -JS

KRAM, $100 from Computer Factory. Needs a disk & 16k. Excellent & fast random file manager. Fine manual. Comes with a simple mailing list program. Actually uses its ROM at $a800. Can't have multiple keys to the same data, a serious limitation in uses that need later sorting. Alternative to JINSAM for those who need to write their own programs. -JS

ASM/TED, $50 from Eastern House Software. Best cassette-only assembler commercially available. Needs 16k. Not for disk* or Basic 4. Printer driver available on request. Versions available for most 6502 computers. Includes nearly every desirable command, even conditional

assembly & macros. Slightly confusing manual. -JS

MAE, $170 from EHS. ASM/TED perfected. Well mated to disk & printer. Needs 32k. Not for Basic 1. Good manual. Includes LOTs of useful accessory programs. The word processor module, included, is better than Word Pro 2 in many ways. Latest version is relocatable & compatible with ASM/TED tapes. Has its own user group (started by me after reviewing MAE for COMPUTE.) -JS

CBM ASSEMBLER PACKAGE, $80 from Commodore. An excellent assembler, similar to MAE. Not for cassette or Basic 1. Fine brief manual. No macros. Handles high & low parts of labels better than MAE, & allows reseting of program counter during assembly. Sends output to disk. Needs a special loader to get it back in memory. -JS

RABBIT, $30 & $50, EHS. Basic 2 only. Quadruples the program loading speed of PET's cassette. Available on tape or in ROM. The ROM sits at $a000. If that spot is free, get the ROM. It saves 40 seconds loading Rabbit itself each time you reset PET. Compatible with Toolkit ROM. Adds a well-done repeat key feature, hex-decimal conversion & 2 memory tests to Basic. Least cost way to faster program loads. ROM version uses part of second cassette buffer. Unfortunately, doesn't speed up data files. -JS

PLANET MINERS, $15 from Avalon Hill. Intermediate complexity. Good game of strategy and chance. Many variables to contend with. Your mission is to be the wealthiest of 4 families, after exploring and mining the planets of our solar system. Figure on spending some time playing, as this game takes thought and planning. -JO

MIDWAY CAMPAIGN, $15, AH. Intermediate complexity. If you like war simulations, you'll enjoy this one. Scaled version of the Battle of Midway between the U.S. and Japan during World War II. The computer is a tough opponent. It takes charge of the Japanese forces, which outnumber yours. As in PLANET MINERS, you must read the well written instructions if you expect to beat the computer. -JO

HEARTS 1.5, $15 from Dynacomp. If you need to have a card game of Hearts, then you'll buy it; otherwise, don't. -JO

GAMES PAC II, $10, Dynacomp. A collection of games, primarily of cards, e.g. Acey Duecy, Crazy 8's. 6 small programs merged into 1 program that requires 16k. User groups have better versions of these games, at a better price. -JO

PENNY ARCADE, $8 from Instant Software. Easy. The only good program in this collection of 8k games, is Solitare. With a little dressing up, it's a good card game. To my knowledge, it's the only Solitare program available for the Pet. -JO

MICROTHELLO, $10 from AB Computers. Challenging to impossible. For anyone remotely interested in Othello, I recommend this program. Written in basic and machine language, it is FAST. Has 6 levels of play. Forget level 5; it's nearly impossible. You use a blinking cursor to move, & you watch the Pet analyze the board, while thinking about its moves. It has many options built-in. You'll enjoy playing it. -JO

DATESTONES OF RYN, $15 from Automated Simulations. Intermediate complexity. The same concept used in this role playing game is used in their other fine program, "Temple of Apshai". The graphics are adequate but slow. it's all in real time, which makes for a good game. If you can't afford "Temple", then buy "Datestones", & save some more for the rest of A.S.'s fantasy role playing games. -JO

Now for a couple of hardware reviews:

THE BASIC SWITCH, $130 & up, from Computer Center of South Bend. For those upgrading to either Basic 2 or Basic 4. Flips quickly & easily between 2 versions of Basic. Includes an extra socket for the Toolkit or whatever. Instructions for the upgrade to 4.0 are sparse so far. The best way to go to 4.0, if you can afford it. Too bad it doesn't also flip the other two ROM sockets. -JS

DIAL-A-ROM, $88 & up, from Kobatek Systems Ltd. The best answer to the rash of new ROM programs for PET, & protection ROMs used in other programs. Switches instantly between 6 ROMs at any one address. Comes in a very nice case that sits next to PET. Has a lite to show PET is on, plus an on/off switch you'd be better off without. -JS

FLIP SORT, $35 from Quiet Designs. a very pretty disk organizer, in static-resistant smoked plastic. Includes a built-in carrying ridge & internal dividers. Said to hold 60 disks, but 30 is about tops for regular use. Much easier to use than anything else I've seen. -JS

That's it for this first issue. Notice we left out programs by JS--Keysort2, Supersort1,1, & the ASM/TED User Group disks U1-U3. Conflict of interest keeps us from reviewing ourselves. An outside review would be OK.

Last words... JS's rumor mill reports that Commodore has a 96k PET. (That's nothing...Fred Hambrecht has a 640k PET...with time-sharing!)

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*=Some PET owners have found ways around these limitations in programs.